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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: THE SIMBA MAKONI FACTOR

Classified By: Amb. James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Simba Makoni's candidacy, first announced on February 5, has shaken up President Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The secrecy surrounding his decision to become a candidate produced surprise; it has also made it difficult for analysts to judge the strength of his support. Most of his presumed backers have not publicly announced their support, and Makoni at separate press and diplomatic briefings on February 13 said he would welcome support from all Zimbabweans, but declined to identify supporters. He stated he would run as an independent candidate.

¶2. (C) Makoni and his advisers have had conversations with Arthur Mutambara and his MDC faction, but a deal for an alliance has not yet been struck. Most political observers believe that a Makoni-Morgan Tsvangirai alliance would present formidable opposition to Mugabe. There have been overtures between the two camps, but each belittles the strength of the other, and an accord does not at this point appear likely. End Summary.

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Confusion Within ZANU-PF  
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¶3. (C) The mastermind behind Makoni's candidacy is Ibbo Mandaza, an academic, publisher, and ZANU-PF critic of Mugabe. Mandaza told us at the end of last year that he was attempting--he thought successfully--to persuade Makoni to become a candidate. Although Mandaza insisted he was on course, his plans appeared dashed when newspapers and Embassy contacts reported that Makoni had seen Mugabe on January 22 and pledged loyalty to him and the party. In retrospect, this appeared to have been a clever strategy to keep Mugabe

in the dark. From January 22 until Makoni announced his candidacy on February 5, local media, which operates as a comprehensive rumor mill, did not speculate about a Makoni candidacy. The media vitriol which spewed toward Makoni after his announcement corroborated reports from Embassy contacts that Mugabe and his inner circle had been surprised by Mandaza and Makoni.

¶4. (C) Apart from the media, and a few Mugabe insiders such as Emmerson Mnangagwa and Political Commissar Elliot Manyika, there has been little public criticism of Makoni. One notable exception was war veteran Joseph Chinotimba who called Makoni a "taitor" and said he would be dealt with. The relatively muted ZANU-PF reaction to Makoni is evidently a result of confusion within the party and uncertainty about how to deal with his challenge. Party spokesman Nathan Shamuyarira, without saying more, announced on February 12 that Makoni's decision to stand as an independent had resulted in his automatic expulsion from the party, and that the Polituburo had affirmed this in a meeting the previous day.

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Makoni's Support  
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¶5. (C) At the announcement of his candidacy on February 5, and at separate press and diplomatic briefings on February 12, Makoni and Mandaza declined to identify backers. This secrecy has made it difficult to gauge the breadth and depth of Makoni's support. Mandaza told us there was significant support in Mashonaland as evidenced by a substantial up-tick in registration after Makoni's announcement, but in the

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absence of rallies or public figures endorsing Makoni's candidacy, actual following is difficult to confirm. The Zimbabwe Independent reported that Makoni enjoyed the support of vice-presidents Joseph Msika and Joice Mujuru, speaker of parliament John Nkomo, defense minister Sydney Sekeramayi, women affairs' minister Oppah Muchinguri, youth minister Saviour Kasukuwere, Solomon Mujuru, retired general Vitalis Zvinavashe, and Mashonaland East governor Ray Kakunde, but to date none of these individuals has gone public.

¶6. (C) A business partner and political advisor of Solomon Mujuru, Tiranvhu Mudariki, told us that Mujuru and others were beginning to suffer in Zimbabwe's parlous business environment and were convinced they could thrive economically only with a change of leadership. He said Mujuru supported Makoni, but would not take an active role in his campaign. He would consider covert financial support.

¶7. (C) While numerous ZANU-PF heavyweights in addition to Mujuru would undoubtedly like to see Mugabe go, they are afraid to challenge him openly. First, they continue to enjoy ZANU-PF patronage, and a challenge to Mugabe would result in an immediate end to their benefits. Secondly, many, including Mujuru, are corrupt, and they know Mugabe has dossiers on them documenting their illegal activities. A challenge to Mugabe could result in their arrest and prosecution. Therefore, these individuals are hoping to ease Mugabe out without a direct challenge. Mudariki noted how difficult this was. The Mujuru faction had tried to challenge Mugabe using party structures last year, and had hoped that a challenger to Mugabe would be nominated at the ZANU-PF Extraordinary Congress in December. He admitted the Mujurus and their allies had been outmaneuvered and had been on the defensive since.

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Next Steps  
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¶8. (C) According to Mandaza, his and Makoni's original plan was for Makoni to present himself as a ZANU-PF candidate in

the party structures, and to try to force Mugabe to step down. The backup plan, if Makoni and his supporters failed to force Mugabe out, was for Makoni to run as an independent. And if he failed to develop sufficient support as an independent, Mandaza said the Makoni team would seek to form a united front with other opposition groups.

¶9. (C) With Makoni's expulsion from ZANU-PF, he is now running as an independent. The next step for him and his supporters will be to gauge strength and determine whether they should explore a united opposition.

¶10. (C) At Makoni's press and diplomatic briefings on February 13, he noted that Zimbabwe was full of fear and polarized, with people suffering from disease and extreme poverty. He said he was offering renewal, and that the symbol of his candidacy would be a rising sun to represent a new dawn. He hoped that others would contest independently under this banner, and that he would accept support from anyone. February 15 is nomination day when candidates must be registered. We will know at that time whether parliamentary candidates will ally with him under his banner.

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The Electoral Playing Field and Possible Alliances  
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¶11. (C) In the wake of the collapse of the MDC reconciliation talks (Reftel), the MDC Mutambara faction will in all probability support Makoni. Mandaza and Mutambara

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have told us they are engaged in talks. Mutambara and the faction itself have little strength, but individual legislators within the faction have support within their constituencies. The faction currently has 20 members of parliament (compared with 21 for the Tsvangirai faction), almost all in Matabeleland. Most of these would support Makoni.

¶12. (C) Tsvangirai's strength is in the urban areas, particularly Harare. He also has substantial support in Matabeleland, although this will be diluted by Mutambara faction MPs who support Makoni. He has little support in Mashonaland, the traditional heartland of ZANU-PF. Tsvangirai's traditional support has weakened. Many

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supporters have become disenchanted by the MDC splits--the Mutambara break away in 2005 and the dismissal last year of Lucia Matibenga as president of the MDC women's wing--and there is considerable apathy.

¶13. (C) As for Makoni, apart from any support the Mutambara faction might bring, he has no support in Matabeleland. He will seek support from urban areas, where, as noted above, the MDC has been historically strong, and from rural areas outside Matabeleland, principally in Mashonaland, where he hopes that traditional ZANU-PF voters have become disaffected and will vote against Mugabe. The MDC is attempting to make inroads among these voters as well.

¶14. (C) With the possibility of Makoni and the MDC splitting the opposition vote in urban areas and Mashonaland, many Mugabe opponents believe a Makoni-MDC alliance would provide the best hope of defeating Mugabe, especially in light of inevitable ZANU-PF electoral rigging. While we understand there have been some behind-the-scenes conversations, both sides have hyped their respective strengths and belittled the strength of the other. Mandaza claimed to us that rural registration had increased significantly since Makoni's announcement and that Tsvangirai was a has-been. Tsvangirai and his advisors have been dismissive of Makoni--Tsvangirai publicly has called Makoni "old wine in a new bottle"--and his advisors have told us privately they are skeptical he has

significant support.

¶15. (C) Without accurate public opinion polls, it is difficult to judge the relative strengths of Makoni and Tsvangirai. It does appear that they will be chasing a lot

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of the same voters. In a three-way race, this would of course benefit Mugabe, and it is therefore logical to believe that a Tsvangirai-Makoni alliance would present the best hope of defeating him. But self-interest has always been an important factor in Zimbabwean politics. and there is no reason to believe at this time that either Makoni or Tsvangirai and their supporters would be willing to play

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secondary roles in favor of the other candidate in order to achieve a united opposition.

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A Note on ZANU-PF  
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¶16. (C) Makoni's candidacy has exposed fissures within the ruling party. Even if Mugabe wins the election, these fissures are bound to grow and ultimately result in either new leadership or in the party's disintegration. Discontent among ZANU-PF officials is widespread, and members of the rank and file are beginning to understand that their predicament is related to misguided party and government policies. Zimbabwe is in a transition; the unanswered questions are what the form of this transition will be and how long it will take.

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Bio Note  
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¶17. (U) Simbarashe (Simba) Makone was born on March 22, 1950, in Rusape, Manicaland. He entered the University of Rhodesia in 1971, but was expelled for leading demonstrations against the government. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry and Zoology from the University of Leeds in 1975 and a PhD in Medical Chemistry from Leicester Polytechnic in the United Kingdom in 1978. He remained in Europe until 1980 as ZANU's chief representative.

¶18. (U) Makoni returned to Zimbabwe in 1980 and at the age of 30 was appointed deputy minister of agriculture. In 1981, he was promoted to the position of minister of industry and energy development. In 1984, he became minister of youth, sport, and culture. In late 1984, he was named executive secretary of SADC, a position he held until 1993.

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¶19. (U) In 1994, Makoni was appointed as managing director of state-controlled ZimPapers. He was fired in 1997 after suspending an editor, a Mugabe relative, for publishing anti-white and anti-free market articles. In 2000, he regained favor with Mugabe and was appointed minister of finance and economic development in what Mugabe dubbed his "war cabinet" to deal with the continuing economic crisis. He was asked to step down in 2002 after he advocated devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar.

¶20. (U) In 2005, the GOZ put Makoni forward for the presidency of the African Development Bank. His failure to land the position was attributed his ZANU-PF affiliation and Zimbabwe's political differences with the U.S. and other Western countries.

¶21. (U) Since leaving government in 2002, Makoni has worked as a business consultant, managed a family-owned textile

firm, and managed a commercial farm which he bought (rather than seized).

¶22. (U) Makoni was a long-standing member of the ZANU-PF Politburo until his expulsion this week from the party.

¶23. (U) Makoni is married and has two sons. A third son committed suicide several years ago while a student in South Africa.

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